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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on open schools or schools without walls, those experiments within the public school system involving a reconceptualization of the role of the school in the educational process. A brief review of the free school movement (those experiments outside public schools) is also included. The stated goal of the open school is to help the child and adolescent move between classroom and community through a series of optimally stimulating settings with access to skills when he needs them, and providing learnings congruent with his own major life experiences. Characteristics of such open systems of learning are described, problems analyzed and two requirements for transforming the public schools given: 1) turning the school into a headquarters and the entire community into a complex of learning sites; and, 2) reorganization of learning across disciplinary lines. The first will involve a substantial redeployment of personnel and resources in public schools as well as a redefinition of the relationships between school and community, teachers and community persons, adults and children. In addition, scholars and university-based professionals can assist in the development of new curricula and educational materials for flexible and more humanized school systems. Useful references on this new school concept are given as well as an extensive bibliography of resources, periodicals, and books. (Author/JSB)

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NEW APPROACHES TO LEARNING:

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AND OPEN SCHOOLS[#]

by Elise Boulding

Shifting from the generalized concerns in the fifties and early sixties over curriculum reform and new teaching methods, the past five years has seen the rise of a number of radical approaches to education which involve a reconceptualization of the role of the school in the educational process. Those experiments which have arisen outside the public schools have enough features in common that they have come to be referred to as the "free school movement." Those that have arisen within the public schools are referred to as "open schools," "schools without walls," or the "school as learning headquarters." While this article will focus primarily on experiments within the public schools, a review of the free school movement is useful in evaluating the context in which public school experiments are taking place.*

The Free School

Hundreds of groups of parents and teachers across the country have come together to establish learning communities which attempt "to build fear-free unhassled envelopes of free space deep within the

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*Private school education is not discussed in this paper, since private schools represent a much older innovative thrust, and a special tradition on the American scene. This is in no way to devalue their contribution to educational change, which has been substantial.

#Prepared for the Science Education Commission of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

heartlands of the dominant culture" through "learning based on love."[1] Love and freedom are the keynotes:

> The idea is that freedom is a supreme good; that people, including young people, have a right to freedom, and that young people who are free will in general be more open, more humane, more intelligent than people who are directed, manipulated, ordered about.[2]

The bureaucratic society is seen as destroying children and adults alike, and these learning communities are felt to be rescue operations for the human race.

These experimental learning communities tend to be short-lived. Part of the reason is financial--the adults involved are often drop-outs from establishment-type jobs or young people who do not wish to become a part of the conventional labor force. Schools cannot be maintained on involvement alone, and this tends to burn out the capacity for commitment on the part of those who have given too much of themselves with too little in return.

Another reason for the high mortality rate among these experiments is the difficulty of finding the right balance between structure and freedom in the educational venture. A confusion of the concepts of authoritativeness and authoritarianism, as is well pointed out in a number of passages in the revealing documentary of alternative education, Rasberry Exercises: How to Start Your Own School. . .and Make a Book,[3] often leads to total abdication of the teaching role. The fear that the misuse of words will destroy experience also leads to abdication of the use of words, which is probably fatal to the learning process.

> You may have been given a stone when, as a child, you asked for bread. Perhaps you too wasted thousands of hours amidst clouds of fat-old-lady teachers' words. These are reasons for throwing out words as vehicles of knowing. Music seems richer; dancing and laughing together more . . . complete.
>
> We feed children abstractions that suck away life, like splitting blood into plasma. Words used against us breed fear of words for <u>any</u> purpose. Understandable, but a throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Words--each in themselves an ancient poem--can carry you back into a primal <u>ground of being</u>.
>
> Words as <u>parts</u> of things, measuring, abstracting, focussing, <u>can</u> pull us from our total experiencing of primal life. But non-verbal symbols can separate as well. And once separated, words can take us back to our most human essence. <u>It can work both ways</u>.[4]

While it is easy to pass critical judgment on the free schools, the basic issue which they raise of how the human spirit can be liberated rather than imprisoned through the educational process is critical for all highly bureaucratized modern societies. The real contribution of this movement may be more in freeing up the larger society to re-examine its educational institutions than in freeing up children to seek new social goals for which old structures cannot provide.*

The Open School

The Open School perches somewhat precariously in the interstices of the local public school system. The Board of Education will have turned over an existing school, or part of a school, or rooms rented somewhere in town, to a group of parents and teachers who have

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*See Appendix IV for a listing of directories and publications concerning the free schools.

contracted with the School Board, often with a local university or college as co-contractor, to teach X number of children for the year. Whatever the physical facilities are, they are only a fraction of the total learning sites which make up the community-classroom of these poetically labeled "schools without walls."

The concept of the formal school plant as a learning headquarters which students and teachers move in and out in the pursuit of learning experiences is just now beginning to attract a great deal of public attention, but in fact Archibald Shaw suggested this in a pioneering proposal entitled "The Random Falls Idea" as far back as 1956.[5] (An abridged form of the proposal is found in Appendix I.) A study of this proposal, and of the current experiments with Open Schools listed in Rasberry[6] (reproduced in Appendix II) will give the reader an idea of what is involved in this approach. (More open schools exist on paper than in fact, so the real possibilities of this approach remain to be tested.) Basically, it means moving away from closed systems to open systems in education. In terms of futuristics and general systems theory, it has been suggested that there is a Basic, Long-Term Multifold Trend (BLTMT, a futuristics concept developed by Herman Kahn and Anthony Wiener[7]) toward open learning systems in the educational enterprise.[8]

The Transformation of the Public School

Turning the school into a headquarters, and the entire community into a complex of learning sites, would involve a substantial redeployment of personnel and resources in our public schools, as well as a substantial redefinition of the relationship between school and

community, teachers and community persons, adults and children. The school headquarters provides classroom teaching for very specific skills, and the rest of the learning takes place in a variety of apprenticeship situations which are arranged between pupils and every adult in the community at his place of work. Figure 1 diagrams the school-community relationship in terms of learning sites. A substantial part of the school personnel, now engaged in classroom teaching or in-house administrative work, would be developing and coordinating the numerous linkages which would be needed to ensure that every adult in the community spent some time in a teaching relationship with pupils at his place of work. As community adults find themselves in teaching roles they never had before, new questions and problems arise for them, new curiosities will be stimulated, and they too will seek the special knowledge skills provided by the headquarters school. The apprentice system of the pre-industrial era, reintroduced in a much more sophisticated way with the aid of modern communications and coordination technology, could humanize both education and work, and break down the rigid age-graded social system which keeps young and old from participating jointly in the two-way communication and learning process which all human societies provided for prior to industrialization and mass education. The mutual mistrust of the young and the not-so-young today is proverbial. Most communitieswould be panicked at the thought of turning children and young people loose all over the community to "learn," and it will be years before a workable program along these lines can be developed in a form that will be usable by and acceptable

COMMUNITY LEARNING SITES

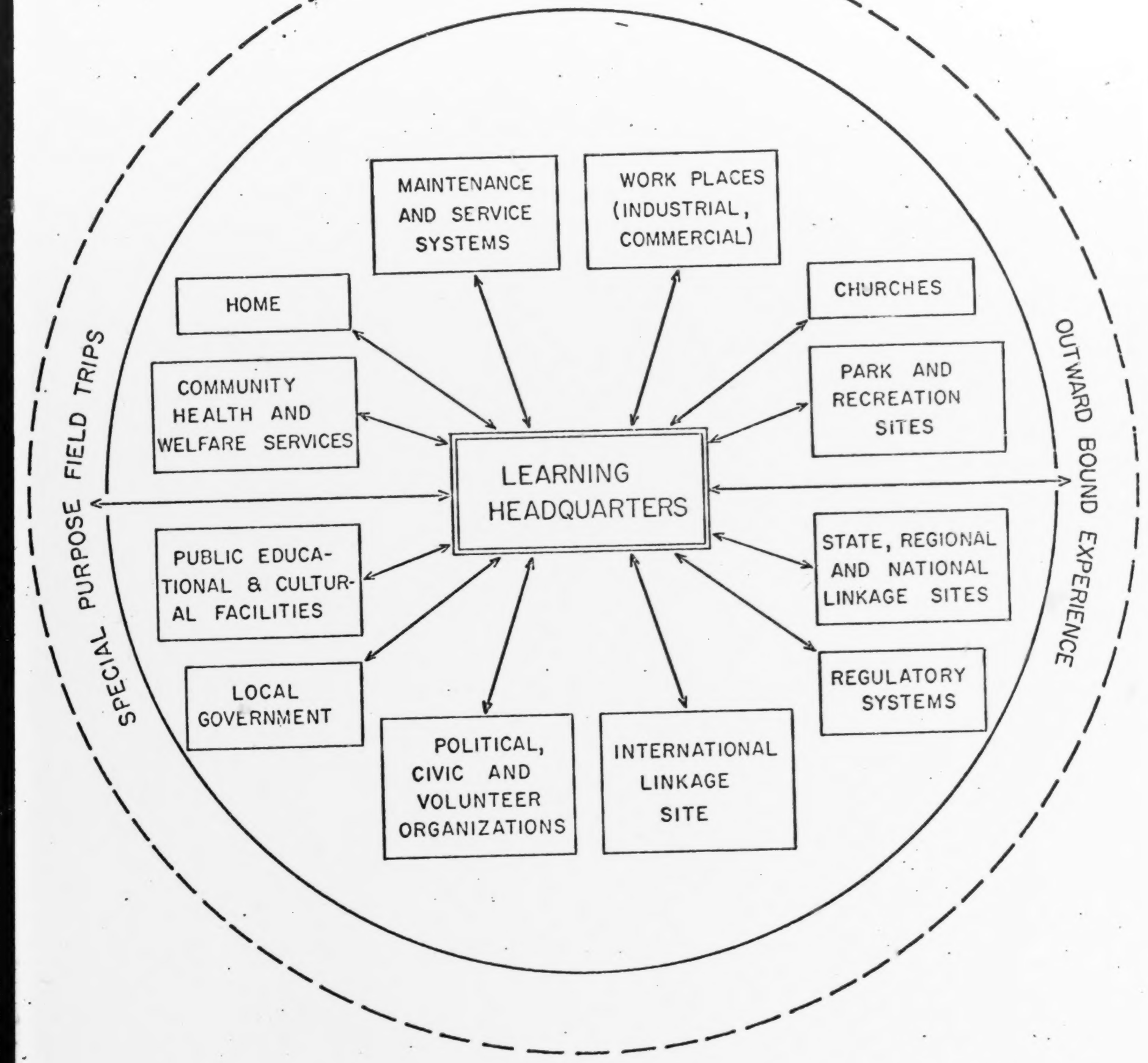

Figure 1.

to the average community.* On the other hand, the work of Shaw in beginning to spell out the logistics in the Random Falls Idea is of incalculable value. Far-seeing school systems can begin now to reassign some of their staff, and find new staff, to begin the long slow job of analyzing the community as a potential learning site. New building programs will become irrelevant with the new minimum-type use of school as headquarters. The resources saved can be used in mapping the community to identify all the relevant sites as suggested in Figure 1, in working with the community to develop the new mechanisms for recruiting its adults as teachers in their own places of work, and in making provision for the numerous physical and coordination details involved.

When new headquarters space is needed, all types of existing buildings can be used in lieu of the large multi-purpose schools we now know. With the entire community as the learning site, the headquarters can be widely spaced, and communications technology can facilitate the necessary information flow.[9]

The Reorganization of Learning

The major contributions to curriculum development in the public schools come from the university. In recent decades substantial numbers of scientists and scholars have given serious thought to

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*The public has learned to accept children in out-of-school settings through the device of the field trip, but the field trip is essentially a temporary extension of the classroom situation, and is carefully bounded in space and time. The community learning site concept involves acceptance of community sites as a permanent extension of the classroom. This will require a major attitude change on the part of the community.

the problems of transmission of knowledge in their specialized fields. At this very moment substantial new breakthroughs seem to be immanent in reconceptualizing knowledge across disciplinary lines and bringing the relevant contents of the natural and social sciences and the humanities together to bear on urgent social problems. The AAAS Commission on Science Education and other groups like it* dedicated to this reconceptualization of learning, face a serious dilemma. On the one hand the ways in which they are accustomed to organizing knowledge lend themselves best to the classroom setting, with field trips as special learning experiences rather than as a core part of the study process. On the other hand it is tomorrow's world which the scientist and scholar wish to prepare children for, and they would like to relate their work to the most innovative thinking about how education will be organized in the future, rather than to how it is now. In fact, scientists face a triple challenge. They are barely beginning to learn to think in transdisciplinary terms, and to communicate with scholars of other disciplines around common problems without simply retreating into their own private disciplinary jargons. At the same time, they are beginning to realize what the newest developments in their own discipline mean for the learning experience of the pre-adolescents and adolescents, and feel the need to reorganize the presentation of learning experiences within the more sophisticated frames of

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*Noteworthy among these efforts is the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study Group project to integrate the Life Sciences and the Social Sciences in a new middle schools curriculum sequence.[10]

reference now available to them. Finally, they are aware of the anguished cry for revelance, the drop-out rate in high schools, and the fact that something is amiss with the traditional structuring of the public educational experience. Any one of these challenges requires major attention by scholars in order to deal with it adequately. How to deal with all three at once?

This can only be done by the scientist-scholar coming out of his disciplinary specialty and establishing a series of coalitions with (1) the most creative and far-thinking colleagues in his own field, (2) colleagues in other disciplines including schools of education, (3) the mavericks in the university who already have substantial community contacts, and (4) the kinds of community persons who are exploring alternative forms of education. This is impossible to ask of any one person, so there has to be a division of labor. Most important, the scientist-scholar has to realize that his own skills and professional knowledge alone are useless in tomorrow's educational enterprise, unless they are fruitfully linked to the relevant skills and knowledge of colleagues in the university and the community. In fact, the whole "professional vs. para-professional" and professional vs. layman dichotomies have to be rethought, in terms of the kind of respect that the university scholar accords the community person without higher education. I am suggesting, in short, that those of us who are based in universities can no longer go on planning curricula for the public schools without substantial involvement with individuals and groups in the community who share our concerns for new open learning systems for tomorrow's world.

The university-based professional who would contribute to tomorrow's education must be willing to do the following:

1. Learn from knowledgeable community experts how to map a community in terms of knowledge and learning sites, and relate his conceptualizations of his own field to the learning experiences that will be available to the pupil in terms of these potential learning sites.*

2. Incorporate the potential teaching of community persons in their places of work to their pupil-apprentices, into his schematic development of knowledge concerning his own field.

3. Draw on the insights of educators, learning theorists and social scientists concerning some basic social experiences and the life-cycle sequence in which they occur for children of the "average" (Anglo middle class) and major ethnic and racial culture groupings, and relate specialized knowledge-development sequences to these life-experience sequences. For example: all school children experience the phenomenon of mobility; mobility in the sense of moving from age to age in their life-span, of moving from class to class and school to school in the public school sequence, and for the majority of them of moving from neighborhood to neighborhood as their families move in a highly mobile population. How can the life-experience of mobility be related to their learnings? Similarly, they all experience a succession of breavements as they experience the "death" of social relationships,

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*A good model for this in the social sciences is provided by W. Ron Jones' Finding Community: Guide to Community Research and Action.[11]

the "death" of roles as they move from one setting to another, and the physical death of animals, family members and friends. How can the life-experience of death be related to their social learnings? There are many other common experiences, including those of dominance-submission and its accompanying inequality, exchange, the problems of coping with technology in its various forms. Relating cognitive learnings to these life experiences enhances the immediacy of the learnings, and as the scholar learns to identify the transdisciplinary or general systems elements which are the building blocks in his own specialized field, he can draw on these common life experiences to sharpen the learnings.

Learning

Ultimately, the scholar-scientist must be willing to integrate his own specialized knowledge with educational theory and developmental psychology if he is to contribute to the learning experience of young persons. In addition to theoretical knowledge, he needs to understand something of the basic commonalities of the life-cycle experiences of young people from birth through high school, and also something of what happens to children when they are faced with challenges outside the commonalities of life experience.*

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*A shorthand way of dealing with these outside challenges is to think in terms of the type of experience exemplified by Outward Bound, a program designed to help young people face their own limitations when confronted with absolute demands made by a hardship-type environment (unfriendly mountain peaks, extreme cold, scarcity of food, etc.). Here young people face both their own inadequacy in relation to a harsh nature, and their interdependency with other human beings in terms of being able to cope if they cooperate (two-person rope-operations up an otherwise unscaleable cliff).

It is particularly important for the scholar to relate his efforts to develop new learning environments and new dimensions of the learning experience, to the accumulating body of learning theory. Four factors dealt with in learning theory which are particularly relevant to the scholar's concerns with the educational process are: (1) the subjective factors on learning which are unique to each individual in the obstacles and opportunities they erect in relating to cognition;[12] (2) the human warmth factor as a part of the learning matrix in adult-child relations;[13] (3) promptness of feedback on attempts to master new cognitions and skills;[14] (4) presentation of new knowledge in such a way that the gap between the familiar and the unknown is optimized and increasingly complex cognitive structures are developed;[15] and (5) promotion of a complex orchestration of different modes of knowing in order to allow for an integration of the cognitive and affective aspects of life experience.[16] It is in the interplay between the subjective factors including the experiences of human warmth, the promptness of feedback on attempts to deal with the environment and the experiencing of optimal challenges of newness that actual learning takes place. Unfortunately the school does very little to foster that interplay and often contributes to a general freezing of the learning environment. Certainly interpersonal warmth cools off in the school room. There is also a sudden slowdown of feedback time and the rate at which new experiences are encountered for the average child as he moves from the multi-stimulus pre-school setting to the monolithic world of the typical desk-and-chair classroom.

Helping the child and adolescent move between classroom and community through a series of optimally stimulating settings within a context that gives his access to skills when he needs them, and provides learnings congruent with his own major life experiences is the goal of the open school. Scholars can assist in the development of new educational materials for more flexible and humanized school systems only to the extent that they are aware of these new types of learning settings and life experiences, and enter into collaboration with those who deal with them at the community level.

April, 1971

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[2]Bonnie Barrett Stretch, "The Rise of the Free School," Saturday Review, June 20, 1970, pp. 76-77.

[3]Rasberry, op. cit.

[4]Ibid., p. 38.

[5]Archibald B. Shaw, "The Random Falls Idea," The School Executive, March, 1956.

[6]Rasberry, op. cit., pp. 95-100.

[7]Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, The Year 2000 (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[8]Michael Marien, "The Basic, Long-Term Multifold Trend in Education," The Futurist, December 1970, pp. 220ff.

[9]See "The One-House School," by Joan Samson in the Teacher Paper, December 1970, pp. 5-8.

[10]"A Proposal for Development of a Curriculum and Assorted Materials for a 3-Year Integrated Life Science Program for the Middle School," Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, William V. Mayer, Director, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

[11]W. Ron Jones with Julia Cheever and Jerry Ficklin, Finding Community: A Guide To Community Research and Action (Palo Alto, Calif.: James E. Freel and Associates, 1971).

[12]Richard M. Jones, Fantasy and Feeling in Education (New York: New York University Press, 1968).

[13]Ibid.; Nancy Bayley and Earl S. Schaefer, "Correlations of Maternal and Child Behaviors with the Development of Mental Abilities: Data from the Berkeley Growth Study," [No. 97], Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, XXIX, 6 (1964).

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[16]Richard Jones, op. cit.; P. S. Holzman, "The Relation of Assimilation Tendencies in Visual, Auditory, and Kinaesthetic Time-Error to Cognitive Attitudes of Leveling and Sharpening," Journal of Personality, XXII (1954), 375-394.

Appendix I

Reprint of

THE RANDOM FALLS IDEA

an educational program and plant

for youth and community growth

-- Abridged --

Text by Archibald B. Shaw

Architectural Studies by John Lyon Reid

from The School Executive, March, 1956

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Appendix II

Reprint of "Far Out Public Schools", from Rasberry Exercises: How to Start Your Own School... and Make a Book, edited by Salli Rasberry and Robert Greenway (Freestone, California.: The Freestone Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 95-100.

(Not Reproducible)

Appendix III

Reprint of "From Yesterday to Tomorrow: The Basic Long-Term Multifold Trend in Education", The Futurist, December, 1970, pp. 222-223.
(Not Reproducible)

APPENDIX IV

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Resources

A Bibliography for the Free School Movement, Summerhill Society, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, New York 10012.

A wide-ranging list of books on children and education.

Big Rock Candy Mountain, c/o Portola Institute, Inc., 1115 Merrill Street, Menlo Park, California 94025.

A new publication similar to the popular Whole Earth Catalogue, but devoted to "resources for ecstatic education." The catalogue reviews chools, teaching methods, toys and games, publications, teaching laboratories, films, tapes, records and highlights new approaches that "make the student himself the content of his learning," are nonmanipulative, and encourage exploration and creativity.

Directory of Free Schools, Alternatives Foundation, 1526 Gravenstein Highway, Sebastopol, California 97452.

The pamphlet includes an essay on "how to Start a Free School," by Frank Lindenfeld, founder of several California free schools.

Farallones Designs, 731 Virginia Street, Berkeley, California.

Farallones is a zany group working out of Berkeley, interested in these things, possibly able to work with you if you're interested in them too. Their motto: "trash can do it!"

They're a group of turned-on architechts, students, and drop outs who are experimenting with education by experimenting with changing learning environments.

As near as we can tell (they change very fast), they're into stockpiling and distributing all sorts of old material and junk (tires, barrels, plastics, boxes, tubes, wire, etc.) for use by kids and teachers. . . .

They also belive that if you "change your surroundings you change yourself," supportable in advanced cognitive theory, and even more so in simple practice.

The Free Learner, compiled by Constance Woulf, 4615 Canyon Road, El Sobrante, California 94803.

A remarkably complete survey of experimental schools in the San Francisco Bay area.

Future Studies Directory, compiled by Billy Rojas, September 15, 1970, Program for the Study of the Future in Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.

A. Resources, continued

New Schools Exchange, 301 East Canon Perdido, Santa Barbara, California.

They publish a Newsletter of articles and information three thimes monthly, publishing a continuing Directory of Innovative Schools, plus twice annual Supplements to the Directory; publish periodic special "psoition papers" on subjects relevant to experimental education; connect teachers with schools, schools with teachers, kids with schools, schools with kids, Good Things with everyone; provide experienced advisors to aid those who are in the process of beginning their own alternative school; put people in contact with others in their area who may wish to join them in their effort toward a new school; publish books, sponsor conferences, and hustle a great deal. . . .

New Schools Manual, New Directions Community School, 445 Tenth Street, Richmond California 94801.

A mimeographed booklet that provides some sueful clues for meeting bureaucratic rules and regulations.

Outward Bound, Outward Bound, Inc., Andover, Massachusetts 01810.

Regional Groupings

Educational Exploration Center, 3104 16th Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403

New Schools Movement, 117 Madrone Place East, Seattle, Washington 98102

Experimental Schools, P. O. Box 2735, Tucson, Arizona 85702

Rio Grande Educational Corporation, 213 1/2 West San Francisco, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Educational Liberation Front, Source Coalition. 2115 S Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20008

The Education Liberation Front began from the realization that our community and all people struggling for self-determination are facing the same lack of project prototypes--how-to information, organizing methods, radical institutional models, etc. By working with other communities to collect and share strategies, we've filled a traveling bus with radical resources.

The Source catalog will hopefully be used as a community organizing model beginning with general research, training and organizing information. It moves on to describe 14 major areas such as justice/repression, education/inculcation. These areas are broken down into 60 sub-areas such as children's liberation and capitalistic health. Each sub-area has three main sections:

B. Periodicals, continued

indictment--educative groups such as Human Medical Rights Committee; defensive actions--counter-institutions such as free clinics; and offensive actions--community control of hospitals for example. At least twice a year this 200-page directory will be revised.

B. Periodicals

AE-about education, 21st and The Parkway, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Magazine.

Canyon Collective, Box 77, Canyon, California 94516.

One of the best and most detailed papers on setting up communities, schools-preparing to fight, having joy.

d.c. Gazette, 109 - 8th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20002.

First-rate underground newspaper.

Edcentric, publication of the Center for Educational Reform, 2115 S Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20008.

An active group heavy after radical change in all education systems. Good news items about resources on high-school strike activities, interesting free universities, free schools, etc. They'll also print your stuff if they like it.

Educate, 33 West 60th Street, New York, New York 10023.

Heavy equipment lists, interesting uses of equipment. Articles about drugs and Carl Rogers. Many ideas.

McGill Journal of Education, Macdonald College, Quebec, Canada.

"I welcome papers that disturb the status quo." Working on the ecology of education. Editor: Margaret Gillett.

Media and Methods, 405 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

A very slick but idea-packed magazine on films and audio-visual stuff. Fantastic reader's service pull-out card--an easy way to get hundreds of catalogs!

Mother Earth News, P. O. Box 38, Madison, Ohio 44057.

The best "new culture" ecology/political non-competitive/systems periodical we've seen. Perhaps the successor to the Whole Earth Catalog. You could construct a free school curriculum with this periodical as a base.

B. Periodicals, continued

New School of Education Journal, 3657 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

No More Teachers Dirty Looks, Bay Area Radical Teachers Organizing Committee, 1445 Stockton Street, San Francisco, California.

Magazine.

Nortwest Passage, 1000 Harris Street, Bellingham, Washington 98225.

The Red Pencil, 131 Magazine Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Newspaper.

Teacher Drop-Out Center, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass 01002.

Hiring/firing information for fed up teachers.

This Magazine Is About Schools, P. O. Box 876, Terminal "A", Toronto 1, Canada.

Many heavy articles about new ways of teaching and learning, accounts of multi-media, commune schools, lots of women's lib and growing-up stuff.

Vocations for Social Change, Canyon, California 94516.

C. Books

A Bibliography on Affective Education, by Alfred and Terry Borton, Albany, New York, New York Educational Opportunities Forum, State Board of Education.

Children's Games in Street and Playground, by Iona and Peter Opie.

One of the great collections of all time--all the games are here, it seems, going back into the past. A feast--a base for constructing new games for now.

Domebook One, by Pacific Domes, Box 1692, Los Gatos, California 95030.

Fantasy and Feeling in Education, by Richard Jones, New York, Harper and Row.

C. Books, continued

Finding Community: A Guide to Community Research and Action, by W. Ron Jones with Julia Cheever and Jerry Ficklin, Palo Alto, California, James E. Freel and Associates, 1971.

Free and Inexpensive Educational Aids, by Thomas J. Pepe, Dover Publications.

Over 1,700 books, films, folders, charts, posters, slides, booklets.

How to Start a High School Underground, John Schaller, CHIPS, 1106 Palm Street, Houston, Texas 77004.

Write to John Schaller, and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and, if possible, a small contribution to help with printing costs.

I-Thou-It, by David Hawkins, [No. 46] Association of Teachers of Massachusetts, Chambers, Nelson, Lancastershire, Spring 1969. Also available (free) as an Occasional Paper from Early Childhood Education Study, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Mass.

Implementing Different and Better Schools, by Don E. Glines, Campus Publishing, Box 1005 Mankato, Minnesota.

Living at Summerhill, (original title, Summerhill a Loving World), New York, Collier-Macmillan.

Outward Bound as Education for Personal Growth, by Dick Katz and David Klob, Alfred Sloan School of Management, MIT, 50 Memorial Drive, Cambridge, Mass., 02139.

Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood, by Jean Piaget, New York, W. W. Norton and Company.

Reach, Touch, and Teach, by Terry Borton, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Teacher, by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, New York, Simon and Schuster, Inc.

Toward A Psychology of Being, by Abraham Maslow, New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.